



Role-playing Techniques to Improve Intercultural Communication Competence

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Abstract: Students' inability to recognize cultural diversity can lead to violence and social gaps. If intercultural communication issues in schools persist, they may harm students' social development. Counseling teachers play a crucial role in fostering intercultural communication skills through role-play that reinforces students' ability to interact effectively with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. This study aims to see the effectiveness of role-playing techniques in improving intercultural communication among tourism vocational school students before, and after the intervention was given, and after 3 weeks, the role-playing technique intervention was stopped. This research is quasi-experimental research with a pre-post group design. The sampling technique is purposive sampling. The data collected in this research was then analyzed using the non-parametric Wilcoxon test. This study's results show differences in students' intercultural communication before and after the intervention. It is hoped that the results of this research can add references to the implementation of role-playing techniques in counseling guidance services.

Keywords: intercultural communication; role playing techniques; tourism students

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INTRODUCTION

Hospitality vocational school students in their late teens have characteristics, needs, and developmental tasks that they must fulfill (Balakrishnan, 2022; Choy & Yeung, 2024). One of the tasks of adolescent development as vocational school students in hotel accommodations is to develop social and intellectual communication skills and art appreciation. If you look at the explanation of the competency standards and basic competencies for Vocational Schools majoring in hotel accommodation in the National Education Ministerial Decree regarding SI and SKL, it is very clear that one of the competency standards for Vocational Schools majoring in hotel accommodation is being able to communicate with colleagues in the workplace (Basori, 2018; Rahmadhani et al., 2022). Students are expected to show politeness, regardless of the cultural background of the person they are communicating with, whether in terms of gender, socio-economic status, religion, ethnicity, or race. Individuals must communicate with each other in everyday life and work life. The fact that people convey feelings, thoughts, desires, and hopes to each other using words and behavior indicates that they are communicating. Communication is a dynamic process where information, feelings, thoughts, and attitudes are shared through symbols between people and groups or at the social level (Garzón-Artacho et al., 2021; Kivunja, 2014). Communication is also an integral part of life and an indispensable phenomenon in individual self-expression that allows the transfer of information between individuals. Although the concept of communication has very different definitions, the common point of these definitions is interaction (Cebollero-Salinas et al., 2022; Dorfman & Kalugin, 2020).

Communicating in diverse cultures, such as Indonesian society, often encounters unexpected problems or obstacles, such as language use, symbols, community values or norms, and so on (Amran et al., 2019; Shanks et al., 2017). Cultural differences, especially in intercultural communication, become a gap, leading to stereotypes of certain tribes/ethnicities. Communication should be able to bridge intercultural communication. This implies that humans find it difficult to fulfill their needs without communication and are isolated. Pinner (2021) shows the strong ties between culture and communication by saying, "The relationship between culture and communication is seen as more reciprocal than causal, where culture can influence communication but is also built and implemented through communication. Communication is often viewed as a patterned code that serves a communal and unifying function. Boonsuk and Ambele (2021) concluded that cultural groups influence how perceptions of reality are created and maintained. All communities in all places at all times express their views through communication patterns. Several Studies published by experts highlight the importance of intercultural communication in today's world. They conducted observations, interviews, and experiments, which found that intercultural conflicts tend to occur or arise in academic environments, especially campus

environments, social communities, and religious communities worldwide. This conflict is usually triggered by a lack of intercultural communication competence (Mamaeva et al., 2022; Romano & Andriyanti, 2021).

Intercultural communication is a term that includes a general meaning and refers to communication between people who have different backgrounds, races, languages, religions, levels of education, social status, and even gender essentially from different cultures (Isnaini et al., 2019; Yuniarto, 2019). Intercultural communication is often interchanged with the terms cross-cultural communication or inter-ethnic communication, but intercultural communication is more inclusive because it does not just study between two ethnic or racial groups. Intercultural communication occurs when the message producer is a member of one culture, and the message recipient is a member of another culture (Baum, 2014; Clark, 2017). It is further said that in the process of intercultural communication, elements determine how to work and function in an integrated way because each of them is interrelated and needs each other. These elements are belief systems, values, attitudes, views of life about the world, and social organization. Intercultural communication leads individuals to equal treatment for individuals from various cultures so that they can get to know each other and interact.

Intercultural communication acknowledges and deals with issues regarding similarities and differences in cultural characteristics between communication actors, but the main point of attention remains the communication process between individuals or groups of different cultures and trying to interact (Bierbaumer, 2021; Köksal & Yürük, 2020). All the definitions above clearly explain that there is an emphasis on cultural differences as a determining factor in the ongoing process of intercultural communication. Widiana et al. (2019) state that there are 3 intercultural communication competencies: knowing the values of one's own culture and those of others (Cognitive), showing positive feelings, respecting and accepting cultural differences (affective), and behaving appropriately and appropriately in the context of intercultural interactions (psychomotor).

A preliminary study was conducted by distributing questionnaires and interviews with guidance and counseling teachers and students at 6 public and private vocational schools in Buleleng Regency. The results of distributing questionnaires showed that around 55% of students did not understand intercultural communication. This was confirmed by the results of interviews, where students were less able to communicate well, which was influenced by cultural differences. These problems cause failure in the communication process, worsening social relations between students. In fact, as we all know, one of the tasks of adolescent development is developing communication skills. Students must understand that communication is not just about conveying and receiving messages; communication skills also need to be paid attention to so that the messages conveyed are easily received and understood by the person they are talking to and understand each other. Through intercultural communication, we can form mutual understanding, foster friendship, and maintain affection and intimacy.

The failure of students to realize cultural diversity makes behaviors that lead to violence, which can create gaps in social relations. Their ignorance in responding to differences as a reality in their social interaction life allows prejudice and negative stereotypes to arise, resulting in discomfort and a non-conductive communication situation between them (Cava et al., 2022; Utomo & Wasino, 2020). The problems above are only some cases that appear on the surface. If we investigate further, many similar cases are still occurring in schools, and they just have not received maximum attention. Therefore, it is crucial to instill the values of diversity in communication through democratic learning patterns, education, and human resource development that recognize equality (equity and equality), justice and law enforcement, human rights, cultural rights of communities and minority groups, ethical principles and morale, and the level and quality of productivity (Eiríksdóttir & Rosvall, 2019; Odondi, 2024).

Based on intercultural communication problems in schools, if left untreated continuously, it will directly or indirectly harm students' personal and social development. Counseling guidance teachers have the responsibility to help students develop intercultural communication skills so that later, students can communicate well with people from different cultural backgrounds (Budianto et al., 2019; Fadkhurosi & Kusmaryani, 2022). One technique that can be used in counseling guidance services is role-playing. Role-playing is developing skills and understanding relationships between people by acting out situations parallel to real life (Kanti, 2014). Meanwhile, other experts say that role-playing is a technique that involves systematic modeling and feedback that is used to develop underdeveloped or inappropriate social abilities. This technique is used in group settings and can assess a person's lack of social skills (Maryanto et al., 2013; Safitri & Moesarofah, 2020).

Kensicki et al. (2022) describe role-playing as a way of acting out certain parts of a person or character as a way of therapy or psychotherapy. In role-playing, students are expected to act out a part of a story or scenario, usually based on real-life problems. Through role-playing, students gain competency in characteristic social skills such as enthusiasm, self-confidence, empathy, and critical thinking. In role-playing, increasing students' skills is the main expected result. However, role-playing is a student-centered technique that can help students develop creativity, cooperation, problem-solving, and communication skills (Kasanah et al., 2019; Oktaviana & Rusnilawati, 2022). Apart from that, to support the result of a role play, it is also necessary to pay

attention to preparations before the role-play is carried out, for example, preparing dialogue, describing the player's character, and outlining the role-play (Hui et al., 2021; Sefriani & Sepriana, 2022).

Role-playing techniques have been proven to be effectively used for problems in communication, especially in interpersonal communication. Papadakis et al. (2020) found that it impacts the effective learning of intercultural communication competencies for nursing students so that when they are later in work situations in hospitals and clinics, they can create harmonious relationships with patients through warm communication. Rohmanurmeta (2017) found that role-playing techniques helped students who experienced interpersonal communication difficulties, so they indirectly improved students' learning achievement at school. Satria and Herumurti (2021) found that role-playing effectively improves students' interpersonal communication skills. The results of data analysis, observations and interviews with students support the findings of this research. Based on interviews conducted, the students said they had been able to understand and change their behavior so that they experienced an increase in interpersonal communication skills. Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the role-playing technique is a comprehensive procedure where the action is carried out by following the stages of group counseling, which in its implementation uses the principles of the role-playing technique. This intervention stage uses video media, story media, student worksheets and self-reflection sheets. The product produced is a module for implementing interventions for guidance and counseling teachers and students. Apart from products in the form of modules, this research also produces media products and measuring instrument products (questionnaires). It is hoped that increasing students' intercultural communication will also positively impact their personal social relationships and social interactions.

METHODS

This study employs an experimental design with a quantitative approach to measure the effectiveness of role-playing techniques in improving intercultural communication among tourism vocational school students (Miller et al., 2020). The research consists of two variables: the independent variable is the role-playing technique, while the dependent variable is the students' intercultural communication skills. A pretest and post-test method assesses changes in intercultural communication before and after the intervention, and a follow-up evaluation is conducted three weeks after the intervention is discontinued to observe its sustainability. The sample is selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure the participants are relevant to the research objectives.

Data were collected using a questionnaire to measure students' intercultural communication abilities. Before deployment, the instrument's validity was tested using SPSS version 26, applying the r_{count} (Corrected Item-Total Correlation) $> r_{\text{table}}$ criterion at 0.378 with an alpha value of 0.05. Reliability testing was performed using the "Cronbach's Alpha" formula, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.909, indicating the instrument is reliable. Data were gathered through pretests conducted before the intervention, post-tests after the intervention, and additional evaluations three weeks after the intervention ceased to examine its long-term effects.

The data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was applied to examine the differences between the pretest and post-test results. The decision-making criteria are as follows: if $Z_{\text{count}} < Z_{\text{table}}$ or $p > 0.05$, H_0 is accepted, indicating no significant difference; conversely, if $Z_{\text{count}} > Z_{\text{table}}$ or $p < 0.05$, H_0 is rejected, indicating a significant difference. This analysis aims to determine the effectiveness of the role-playing technique in enhancing intercultural communication immediately after the intervention and three weeks after the intervention ended.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To answer the first hypothesis in this research, namely that there are differences in intercultural communication among Tourism Vocational School students before the role-playing technique intervention and after the intervention, measurements were carried out by comparing the pretest and post-test 1 (after the intervention was given). Previously, the overall increase in the results of role-playing technique interventions to improve intercultural communication will be described in the Wilcoxon Rank Test statistical analysis, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Wilcoxon Rank Test statistical analysis

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	6	82	110	93.17	10.362
Posttest 1	6	180	211	194.50	11.979
Valid N (listwise)	6				

Based on Table 1, the research subjects were six people. The minimum score on the pretest was 82, and on post-test 1 was 180. Meanwhile, the maximum score on the pretest was 110, and on post-test 1 was

211. The average score from the pretest results was 93.17, and the average post-test result was 194.50. The result of the average score is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The average score

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Post-test 1 - Pretest	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00
	Positive Ranks	6	3.50	21.00
	Ties	6		
	Total	6		

a. Posttest 1 < Pretest

b. Posttest 1 > Pretest

c. Posttest 1 = Pretest

Based on Table 2, in the comparison table Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test between the pretest and post-test above, the value of the negative rank is 0, the value of the positive rank is 6, and the value of the tie is 0, which means that there are no subjects whose post-test value is 1 less than the pretest value. The pretest and post-test hypothesis test is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The pretest and posttest hypothesis test

	Post-test 1 - Pretest
Z	-2.201
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.028

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on negative ranks

Table 3 shows a significance figure of 0.028, which means less than 0.05, so H_0 is rejected, and hypothesis 1 is accepted. There are differences in intercultural communication between Tourism Vocational School students before and after the intervention. The first hypothesis in this research is that there are differences in intercultural communication between Tourism Vocational School students before and after the role-playing technique intervention. To answer the first hypothesis in this research, it can be seen from the pretest hypothesis test with post-test 1 showing a significance number of 0.028, which means less than 0.05, so H_0 is rejected, so hypothesis 1 is accepted. There are differences in intercultural communication between Tourism Vocational School students before and after the intervention. The results of the data analysis show that the role-playing technique intervention has proven to be effective in increasing the intercultural communication competence of Tourism Vocational School students. This intervention has proven effective because, with role-playing techniques, students can act out and practice the desired skills until they have mastered them. This follows the opinion expressed by [Kong and Yong \(2022\)](#) and [Widiana et al. \(2024\)](#), who state that if the same behavior is displayed repeatedly, it can become a habit so that the skills learned will be internalized within the person, the same is valid with intercultural communication competence, after being studied repeatedly. Developing intercultural competence is paramount in the globalized world.

Many scholars have stressed the importance of graduating intercultural competent communicators who can interact with multicultural customers, colleagues, and partners within and across international borders ([Alizadeh & Chavan, 2016](#); [Kerkhoff & Cloud, 2020](#)). For example, [Shao et al. \(2016\)](#) state that as the world has become a global village with advanced technological means for communication, it becomes customary for people from diverse cultures to communicate, rendering intercultural communication a necessary skill to be learned (p. 2780). In addition, [Kerkhoff and Cloud \(2020\)](#) assert that there is a need to graduate global citizens who understand the nuances of otherness to communicate effectively with multicultural people and hence meet the demands of the digitalized world. [Parker \(2019\)](#) stipulates that effective intercultural communication is a must in today's workplaces as an increasing number of company leaders "prioritize diversity and inclusion in their workplaces" (para. 1). In the end, it will become a habit and become an inherent competency in students. Through role-playing, students observe the behavior played by the players and then practice the behavior with other students. This follows the social learning theory put forward by [Oktaviana and Rusnilawati \(2022\)](#): students can learn by observing and imitating behavior through models (teachers, parents, or other people).

To answer the second hypothesis in this research, that there is no difference in the intercultural communication of Tourism Vocational School students before and after three weeks of intervention, measurements were carried out by comparing the scores of post-tests 1 (after the intervention was given) and post-test 2 (three weeks after the intervention given). Previously, the overall increase in intervention results after the intervention and after 3 weeks of intervention given role-playing techniques to improve intercultural communication will be described in the Wilcoxon Rank Test statistical analysis as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Wilcoxon Rank Test statistical analysis

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	6	180	211	194.50	11.979
Posttest 1	6	182	208	195.17	10.889
Valid N (listwise)	6				

Based on Table 4, there were six research subjects. The minimum score in post-test 1 was 180, and in post-test 2 was 182. Meanwhile, the maximum score in the pretest was 211, and in post-test 1 was 208. The average score from the pretest results was 203.50, and the average post-test result was 203.17. The result of the comparison of Wilcoxon signed ranks is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Comparison Wilcoxon Signed Ranks

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Posttest 2 – Posttest 1	Negative Ranks	2	4.00	8.00
	Positive Ranks	4	3.50	13.00
	Ties	0		
	Total	6		

- a. Posttest 1 < Pretest
- b. Posttest 1 > Pretest
- c. Posttest 1 = Pretest

Based on Table 5, the value of the negative rank is 2, meaning two students experienced a decrease in intercultural communication scores. In comparison, the value of the positive rank is 4, which means four students experienced an increase in intercultural communication scores. The ties value is 0, meaning no students have the same score between post-tests 1 and 2. The hypothesis test is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Hypothesis testing for post-test 1 and post-test 2

	Posttest 2 – Posttest 1
Z	-541
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.589

- a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test
- b. Based on negative ranks

The hypothesis testing in Table 6 for post-test 1 and post-test 2 shows a significance figure of 0.589, which means it is more significant than 0.05, so H_0 is accepted, so hypothesis 2 is accepted. There is no difference in intercultural communication between Tourism Vocational School students before and after the role-playing technique intervention. The second hypothesis in this research is that there is no difference in the intercultural communication of Tourism Vocational School students after the role-playing technique intervention was given, and after three weeks, the intervention was stopped. To answer the second hypothesis in this research, a significance number of 0.589 so that H_0 is accepted, so hypothesis 2 is accepted. There is no difference in intercultural communication between Tourism Vocational School students before and after the intervention.

The purpose of the second hypothesis in this research is as a follow-up research action, where this action is to see the extent of the consistency of intercultural communication values after the intervention was carried out and after three weeks, the intervention was stopped. The results of the analysis prove that in this study it turns out that the scores obtained from the results of the post-test 1 and post-test 2 measurements in the experimental group did not have any significant differences, meaning that the measurements between post-tests 1 and 2 were consistent, even after the intervention was stopped for 3 weeks, the students were still able to maintain their intercultural communication competence.

If we look at the scores obtained without statistical calculations, the difference in the results obtained for each research subject is not too high. The average difference obtained is around 2-3 points. Researchers have obtained several findings regarding the results of this second hypothesis. The first finding is that several factors influence the process of providing intervention, such as the physical condition of students participating in counseling, the situation and conditions during the implementation of counseling, and the condition of the trainer or counselor. This is the same as stated by [Alrehaili and Al Osman \(2022\)](#), who state that the factors that influence the process of developing human behavior are the self and the environment. This environment can be in the form of teachers, students, friends, and parents, who are also responsible for developing students' personal and social aspects.

The second finding was that students seemed to have difficulty harmonizing the verbal and non-verbal language, even though verbal language and non-verbal language must be in harmony. Besides, many things must be considered when using verbal and non-verbal language. This is reinforced by Bierbaumer (2021). There are six barriers in intercultural communication: anxiety, assuming similarities, not differences, ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudice, language, and non-verbal misinterpretation. Non-verbal communication provides more appropriate messages than verbal communication (Atabaeva, 2019; Zashchirinskaia, 2020). Most people know that languages are different but tend not to realize that non-verbal messages are also different. Non-verbal misinterpretation is another major obstacle that must be overcome in intercultural communication (Haman et al., 2017; Sutiyyatno, 2018). From this discussion, it was found that communication should make it easier for humans to interact and realize the aims and objectives to be conveyed. One type of communication that is important for individuals to know is intercultural communication. Bierbaumer (2021) explains that communication between people is bound by culture. In this case, if there are cultural differences between one another, then the communication practices and behavior between everyone must be what is built will also be different.

Novelty role-playing in the context of intercultural communication involving verbal and non-verbal language is a training method in which participants play a role in a simulation or scenario that shows intercultural interactions using verbal (spoken language) and non-verbal elements (such as body movements, facial expressions, eye contact, and gestures). In this context, the novelty role-playing approach aims to increase participants' understanding of the different cultural ways of using language and non-verbal cues and their impact on intercultural communication. Here are some of the advantages of role-playing in overcoming the challenges of intercultural communication, both verbal and non-verbal:

1. Overcoming Verbal and Non-Verbal Misinterpretation:

- a. Misinterpretation of Communication: Sometimes, verbal or non-verbal messages can be misunderstood due to cultural differences. For example, polite speech in one culture can sound less severe or insincere in another culture. In a role-playing scenario, participants can experience and overcome these misinterpretations, recognize signs indicating confusion or discomfort, and find ways to improve communication.
- b. Constructive Feedback: Through this exercise, participants can receive direct feedback on using verbal and non-verbal language in an intercultural context. This feedback will help them understand possible mistakes and improve their communication.

2. Improving Adaptability in Communication:

- a. Flexibility in Communication: Through role-playing, participants are trained to be more flexible in adjusting their communication style. For example, they can learn when to speak more directly or subtly and adjust their body language to suit another culture.
- b. Multicultural Skill Development: By understanding that verbal and non-verbal language can vary significantly across cultures, participants will be better prepared to adapt and avoid conflict or misunderstanding in intercultural communication.

3. Simulation of Language and Non-Verbal Use in Real-World Situations:

- a. Practical Scenarios: In novelty role-playing, participants can be involved in scenarios that simulate real-world situations, such as an intercultural business meeting, a meal together in another culture, or a cross-cultural job interview. This allows them to hone their verbal and non-verbal communication skills in a more realistic and relevant context.
- b. Cultural Reflection: Participants can analyze the roles and scenarios they play to understand how different cultural elements—both verbal and nonverbal—can change the way a message is received and responded to by others.

Overall, role-playing is a very effective technique for addressing the challenges of intercultural communication, both in terms of verbal and nonverbal language. It allows participants to learn from firsthand experience, identify potential communication problems, and develop the skills necessary to interact more effectively with people from different cultures.

CONCLUSION

The research results prove that role-playing techniques effectively improve intercultural communication for Tourism Vocational School students. This evidence is shown by the differences in intercultural communication before and after the intervention, and there was even a positive trend due to an increase in intercultural communication scores in each measurement, from pretest, posttest-1, to posttest-2. Furthermore, this research

proves that in all subjects, as shown by increasing pretest and post-test scores in each intervention, intercultural communication can be improved by providing continuous training. The role-playing technique is a guidance service that can be used as an alternative by counselors at tourism vocational schools in helping students, especially students who have low levels of intercultural communication, to improve their life skills, which in turn will become additional skills for students when they graduate and are faced with the world of work so that later they are expected to solve their problems, especially those related to intercultural communication. Apart from functioning as personality development (development), this intervention also has a preventive function: preventing students from feeling unable to interact with other people in various aspects of life. Role-playing can significantly impact intercultural communication practically and effectively regarding cultural understanding, adaptation, and improving communication skills. This technique allows participants to experience cultural differences firsthand, improve their skills in interacting with people from other cultures, and minimize misunderstandings that can arise in intercultural communication.

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